Acts 4:23-31

Ground Shaking Prayer

adapted from the sermon of Lyndon Beasy – August 17, 2014

Acts 4:23-31

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.

“Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: “‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

What stands out with this group of early followers of Jesus is that in their time of crisis they didn't panic, run or fight! What they did was PRAY! But it wasn't just any old prayer. What the believers prayed here was one of the most powerful prayers of all time! It had ground shaking power!

Let's investigate WHY. Because today in your crises, suffering and persecution for the sake of your faith in Jesus, in a world that rejects Jesus & ridicules you, God doesn't want you to panic, run or fight. He wants you to also pray & rely on His ground shaking power!
The first reason why their prayer was ground shaking...

1. They Recognized God’s Control (v24)

They began their prayer by addressing God as the “Sovereign Lord” - the one who is in control of all things.

DISCUSSION

- Why do you think they prayed specifically and first of all to recognize God’s Sovereignty? Why not instead just call on “Lord” “God” or “Father”?

In the original Greek the word for Sovereign Lord also gives us our English Word Despot, which we use today negatively for a ruler who abusively exercises absolute authority & power. But here in this prayer the context is recognizing the absolute sovereignty – the unparalleled control of the Almighty God.

And when we are experiencing tough times in life, crises, injustice and even persecution for our faith, it’s good to remember we have the almighty sovereign despot on our side.

And so then when we pray, we need to recognize this!

God is not just a wise old grandfather in heaven, He’s not just distant power, He’s not just a cosmic Santa Claus giving us what we want on special occasions when we ask, He’s not a timid, impotent Deity confused about what to do or how to do it. He is the Sovereign Lord and Creator of all! He is the one who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them! No one else did!

No one else had a hand in creation, no man can create something from nothing despite how intelligent humanity thinks it’s becoming

Even Satan, God’s most powerful opponent, is only a fallen angel, just another created being. Satan is not a creator! No one & nothing else is above the Sovereign Lord and creator. Everything has been created by Him and is subject to Him even if they oppose Him.

The Sovereign Lord cannot be overthrown and His purposes cannot be hindered. Whatever may seem to us to be hindering his plans on earth, is only what He permits to happen for His grander reasons beyond our understanding. We end up only seeing life and God’s purposes through the pinhole of time & human limitations. Whereas God is the Alpha and Omega – He is & sees the beginning and the end, He’s existed in eternity past before anything was created and will continue to be the Sovereign Lord forever more.

DISCUSSION

- How do you think it should practically look in life for us to genuinely believe and relying on God’s Sovereignty? What differences should it make to how we live?

2. They Remembered God’s Word (v25-28)

Not only do we need to recognize that God’s in full control but that He has actually spoken and continues to speak His Word into our circumstances today.

Although we have a limited perspective on all that is going on and what God is doing, we aren’t also flying blind! God has already revealed to us WHO He is and WHAT His plans are through the revelation of His Written Word.

The believers prayed here in Acts 4 remembering God’s Word from Psalm 2 which describes the revolt & plans of the nations against the Lord and His anointed One.
Its short sighted context was the crowning of David as the King of Israel. And all other rulers were expected to submit to his Kingship but some refused. But Psalm 2 reveals that God only laughs and scoffs at their rebellious opposition and will rebuke & destroy any attempts to hinder His plans and overthrow the Kingship of His Anointed One.

But then here in Acts 4, according to the believers in their prayer, Psalm 2 it was actually also prophetic of the opposition that was now coming against God’s plans and His Anointed One in King Jesus. They prayed - Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

The enemies of God and His Anointed One were now identified as Herod, Pilate, Romans and Jews who all “ganged up” against Jesus to crucify Him. But God’s plans were not defeated! God actually used their opposition against them to, better yet, raise Jesus from the dead and enthrone Him in heaven.

And ironically, because God is sovereign over all powers, authorities and plans, the opposition only ended up doing what God had decided in advance they should do!

When opposition comes against you, when difficult times strike, even when all hell seems to be breaking loose, don’t just focus on the circumstances - Remember the Word of God. Remember it applies to your circumstances today and it isn’t just an historical document full of interesting stories. It’s the mind of God, it’s God breathed, it’s alive and active.

Ephesians 6 actually calls the Word of God a spiritual weapon “sword of the Spirit.” So it relates to your life today. God will speak through it help you fight your life’s battles and direct your steps.

**DISCUSSION**

- Share how remembering the Word of God has strengthened and directed you in your challenging times? Maybe recall any verses and promises that you return to regularly?

3. They Requested God’s Action (v29-31)

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

It’s very interesting to notice what they didn’t ask God to do. In the face of opposition and threat, they didn’t ask for protection, relief or rescue, which you’d think would be the first thing on their mind and probably what most of us would naturally ask first of all – God get me out of here – God get rid of them – God make it go away!

But instead they asked for:

**Bold Obedience for God (29)**

They did not ask God for Escape but Enablement – Not Protection but Power – not to change their circumstances but to equip them to make the best use of the circumstances, which, as the Sovereign Lord, He had already predetermined to happen for His purposes.

One Christian author wrote (Phillips Brooks) “Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men and women. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks”
Our biggest battle is really not against the authorities and powers that oppose God and us. Our biggest battle is really our **own obedience**.

The Devil knows this and will do whatever He can to cause us fear, intimidation and insecurity to distract our focus away from the “sovereignty of God.” That’s why Ephesians 6 also charges us – “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” And the Devil’s schemes are all about stopping you from obeying God and experiencing what God alone can do with your life, because the Devil fears you discovering it!

Whatever you are going through that’s causing you suffering & sacrifice or confusion & distress, I encourage you to pray to your “Sovereign Lord” not just for rescue & relief but for boldness & obedience to obey God despite the consequence. And live out the prayer of Jesus in His time of need “Yet not my will but yours be done”.

Although it’s important for us to pray for bold obedience, we still don’t have **what it really takes** to achieve what God has called us to do! But **God does**! He has **what it takes** and that’s why these believers also prayed with great faith for ...

**Supernatural Power from God – (v30)**

Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

If there’s one thing that many Christians and churches don’t really expect and pray for anymore, it’s the **supernatural power of God**!

**DISCUSSION**

- Why do you think this may be the case?

Even if it’s not been your common experience, even if you think God only acts in an observable miraculous way at certain times in certain circumstances, there’s still **no biblical or historical evidence** that God’s supernatural power was **only** for these believers! There’s no reason why we should stop asking God to **again stretch out His hand** to heal and perform signs & wonders in the name of Jesus! Because God’s power hasn’t changed and the “Name of Jesus” is still the only name and power of salvation.

So let’s start to be a **church that believes again** that God wants to **stretch out His mighty hand** upon, through and around us so that He is revealed and glorified powerfully in our day! If we don’t, He probably won’t! Because God requires us to have faith in his power & authority and faith starts by simply asking!

Just **imagine being a Centre** of God’s **healings, signs and wonders**. Just imagine the impact in our church, community, city, nation and world if God’s supernatural power was released?

**DISCUSSION**

- Just dream and share together about the potential of God’s power being released again like this. What do you think it could like? What difference would it make?

**After the early church believed & asked for it, guess what?? They got IT!!**
4. They Realized God’s Power (v31)

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

It’s really cool that what God did here wasn’t just for show but had clear purpose -
- The Place was shaken - to evidence the presence of God
- The Filling of the Spirit - to empower the people of God
- The Bold speaking of God’s Word - to extend the purposes of God

And Just imagine:
- This place being shaken and made Holy Ground – it happened then, why not now?
- All of us being filled with the Spirit – it happened then – why not now?
- All of us going out with new supernatural boldness & courage to speak the Word of God – it happened then, why not now?

Response

- What crisis or challenge are you facing today?
- What encouragement & evidence of God’s presence do you need to press on through your dark valley?
- Will you ask and call on the “Sovereign Lord” to act? Will you believe in Him to work miracles in your life and circumstances?

Pray together with new boldness and faith